

When Division and Discord Comes, Part 2 - Acts 15:5-11 – April 27th, 2008

- After about a year on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas are back at their home church in Antioch.
- While there, a constituency of Jewish believers; come from Judea to Antioch spreading discord and division in the churches.

- Chapter 15 is thought to be one of the most important chapters in the book of Acts because of what's at stake for the early church.
- Luke, by the Holy Spirit, records for us what Paul, Barnabas, the Apostles and the church do when this division and discord comes.
- There are a number of lessons we can learn from the text we have before us, and I would like to look at them today in our study.

1. It usually involves false teaching (Verse 1)

- These Judaizers were going to the churches and falsely teaching that the Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to be saved.

2. It may warrant a sharp dispute (Verse 2)

- This causes Paul and Barnabas to sharply dispute and debate them because of the serious nature of what their false teaching implied.

3. It should keep us on track (Verses 3-4)

- They're sent to Jerusalem to meet as a council and decide what to do. On their way, they share with the churches the goodness of God.

4. It can have at its core; legalism (Verse 5)

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

v5 Some of the believer's belonging to the Pharisees stood up and said that the Gentiles are required by law of Moses to be circumcised.

- The Pharisees, which was what Paul used to be, were very legalistic, so it's no wonder that they would impose this law for salvation.
- If they were right, then it brings into question whether or not the Gentiles were really saved because they didn't adhere to Jewish law.

"It was time that this question was settled once for all, before division grew up as the result of it. The first question – 'Can the Gentiles be saved?' had been answered; the second was the one before us – 'Must they not be circumcised?'"

Charles Spurgeon

- It seems that the council at this conference in Jerusalem had resembled that of a court room, and the Jury was out regarding this law.
- This was most serious "salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone," was on trial. Christianity could be sentenced to obscurity.

"The day of the debate was set. There can be little doubt that it was a fateful day for the future of Christianity. Failure to reach the right decision would forever split the church or else reduce it to the status of a Jewish cult. No doubt the apostles themselves were awed by the responsibility that rested on their shoulders. There could be no frivolous or light decision. Although all of them were somewhat awed by Paul, at the same time they were likely to be intimidated by the considerable and vocal segment of legalizers in the church. The opinion of James would ultimately be crucial to the entire debate – and James was inclined to be a legalist."

John Phillips "Exploring Acts" Volume 2, p291

5. It sometimes means there's favoritism (Verses 6-9)

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

v6-7 After much discussion, Peter addresses them in defense of the Gentile believers by referring to how God sent him to Cornelius.

v8-9 He tells them that God accepted and gave them the Holy Spirit and doesn't favor Jews over Gentiles. He makes no distinction.

- God taught Peter to see Gentiles in a new way; they were no different than Jews. No longer would they be treated as in the days of old.

"The old leaven showed itself. How closely do old ways and thoughts cling to even regenerate men!"

Charles Spurgeon

- I suppose it's this very thing that causes so much conflict in churches today; we develop our Christian cliques and don't let others in!

6. It will place an unbearable burden on people (Verse 10-11)

10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

v10 He asks them why they are testing God by putting a burden around the necks of the people that nobody has been able to bear.

v11 He tells them that it's through the grace of our Lord Jesus that "we are saved, just as they are." Notice he doesn't say it vica-versa.

- So the question is; "why are these Jews putting this burden on the Gentiles?"
- I suggest that one reason is, they desire to have a power and control over the Gentile converts.
- How many churches have been split because someone on a power trip wanted to be in control?

- We have an example of this in 1 Kings 12 when Rehoboam was to be made King of Israel and sought advice from two groups of men.
- The older men told him to lighten the burden on them, but the younger men told him, since he's in power he should make it heavier.
- Rehoboam takes the advice of the younger men, and places an unbearable burden on the people and it splits the nation of Israel.
- It's been said; the burden of the law will lead to division and rebellion, but love will lead to unity and relationship. It's a get to not got to.

1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, NIV

Matthew 11:28-30 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." NIV